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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001518

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTION #26: MEJIA CLOSES DEAL - FELLO
IS RUNNING MATE

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 1319

[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 1300

[1](#)1. (U) This is no. 26 in our series on the Dominican
presidential election:

MEJIA CLOSES DEAL; FELLO IS RUNNING MATE

(U) PRD Secretary General Rafael "Fello" Subervi Bonilla has agreed to become President Mejia's running mate in the May 16 election" for the sake of PRD unity and keeping the party in power." This follows weeks of back-room parlays. Subervi had opposed re-nomination of the President and competed with Mejia for the PRD presidential nomination, but the PRD leadership had kept bridges open by naming Subervi Secretary General of the Party in January. Mejia and advisors made a well-publicized pilgrimage to Fello's home on March 3 to offer the VP nomination, which Fello had previously insisted he would never accept. To no one's surprise, on March 4 he announced on national television his acceptance. Subervi cast himself as a PRD apostle with 43 years of unwavering, unblemished service, pursuing the virtually unattainable holy grail of party unity. The 35-minute talk was as long as Mejia's state-of-the-republic address. Partisans in the studio supported him with applause and campaign chants.

(SBU) Fello played hard poker until the last minute. His rumored winnings: RD pesos 70 million (US \$1.4 million) in "campaign funds" to cover his expenses to date and an undisclosed number of government positions for his followers. A PRD insider tells us he wants for his supporters 9 provincial governorships, the Consulate in Miami, and the Ministry of Tourism (his post for the last 4 years). Subervi denied getting any payoff but left the door ajar for future distribution of patronage. Mejia also denied having made any such commitments. An adviser to Subervi told poloff that Mejia would announce cabinet changes as early as March 9 (Mejia assured the Ambassador in late February that changes were imminent). Some will probably benefit Subervi's faction.

(SBU) Whether the canny, sleazy Fello can salvage the President's re-election bid is doubtful. Chief adversary, former president Leonel Fernandez (PLD), is reminding everyone that he scored 63 percent of voter intentions in the latest poll, far ahead of Mejia and Eduardo Estrella (PRSC) with 15 percent each. Subervi's rejection rate was 79 percent, close to Mejia's 86 percent. Some 42 percent of PRD voters in 2000 (and almost as many PRSC) said they would switch to the PLD in 2004. PLD Secretary General Reynaldo Pared Perez told poloff March 4 that, in light of this and other credible polls, "only an act of God" could prevent a Fernandez victory May 16 or in a second round June 30. In his call on the Department on March 2 Fernandez stressed the need to keep the elections honest.

(C) Mejia and his inner circle have poo-pooed the polls and shown a resolute face of optimism. Labor Minister Ray Guevara stressed to the Ambassador on March 6 that PRD affiliates number 1.4 million and the challenge is to get them to vote rather than to abstain; he sees the PRD's natural strength as almost 45 percent of the expected votes. Mejia's reach for party unity was a major objective of his February 27 state-of-the-republic message, and his choice of Fello has the same purpose. Another adviser assured poloff on March 3 that Hipolito and Fello together "will unify more than 95 percent" of the party. This advisor asserts that the President's relentless series of trips to the provinces to inaugurate piped water systems, roads, bridges, schools, and other public works will catapult him into first place. With factional splits healed, the PRD masses will mobilize, and then "there is no way" Fernandez can win.

(SBU) Bravado aside, the Mejia-Subervi campaign team is

trying to patch the gaps in its base. Subervi in his acceptance speech called on PRD mavericks Hatuey De Camps and Vice President Milagros Ortiz-Bosch to support the mainline PRD candidates. Ortiz-Bosch has released her followers to vote their consciences and party matron Peggy Cabral (wife of the late, hallowed Pena Gomez) is promoting Milagros for the party presidency. One of our contacts says that Milagros may be invited now to chair the November PRD national convention in November. Mejia visited former vice president and dissident PRSC leader Carlos Morales Troncoso March 4 to explore a cross-party alliance that might undercut Fernandez.

(C) Subervi, 61, has been a PRD militant since his law school days in the 1960s. He has served as Secretary of State for Tourism (twice), Mayor of Santo Domingo (two four-year terms) and deputy in the lower house of Congress (two non-consecutive terms). To our certain knowledge his closest collaborators sought hefty payoffs to influence decisions on municipal procurement and tourism concessions; they probably obtained many and probably shared those with Subervi. He belongs to a prominent Barahona family and is an officer in several family-owned companies. He is married and has three children. He does not speak English.

12. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell.
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